



Urban & Environmental Policy Institute  
OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE  
...for a more just, livable and democratic region.



## The Farm to Preschool Program

### Program Information

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#### Introduction

The Farm to Preschool Program at the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI), Occidental College, is designed to influence early childhood eating habits, which is crucial to maintaining a healthy weight and preventing childhood obesity. The program includes the introduction of farm-fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables as part of the preschool menu, culturally- and age-appropriate nutrition education, and helps establish healthy food policies which can increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables at preschools, influence life-long eating patterns, and improve the overall health and well-being of young children and families. The program also seeks to create greater awareness of, and increase access to, fresh fruits and vegetables within the home for the benefit of the entire family and the community. As a natural expansion of the national farm to school model, this program also supports local farmers and the economy through farm and market-based purchasing.

### Program Components

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#### Food Purchasing and Preparation

UEPI works with site administrators to find the best mode of purchasing locally sourced fruits and vegetables for meals, snacks, taste tests and educational activities. UEPI helps facilitate menu changes at preschools which may include collaborating with contracted vendors to incorporate locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables into meals and snacks or working with local farmers and farmers' markets to arrange for direct purchases with schools. This program does not aim to eliminate existing food contracts, but to find the best means for improving in-school nutrition with seasonal and fresh items most compatible with the site's resources.

#### Food and Nutrition Education

To complement the introduction of more and varied fresh fruits and vegetables in the classroom, participating sites provide food and nutrition education to the students through a UEPI modified nutrition curriculum (*Harvest of the Month*), and through continual role-modeling and positive reinforcement in the classroom. In-class activities involve reading books about fruits and vegetables, conducting art, science and gardening-based activities, as well as holding monthly taste tests and interactive snack preparations. If a site is interested in starting a garden or other complimentary activities such as composting, UEPI will provide technical assistance and additional curricula. UEPI provides copies of educational materials and optional supplements and trains teachers with the curriculum resources. UEPI can also offer ongoing technical assistance with the materials, as well as provide staff to teach a demonstration lesson.

## **Parent Workshops**

As a continuation of the child nutrition curriculum, it is vital to address the needs of parents and other family members. In order for sustainable dietary changes to be made at the preschool level, caregivers need to be educated and engaged as well. Two or more workshops per year are organized and implemented by UEPI, with assistance from the preschool site. The content of parent workshops vary, and each site works directly with UEPI staff to design workshops specifically meeting the needs of their parents. These workshops may include the following: cooking demonstrations, taste tests, information on accessing local farmers' markets or CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs, topic-driven nutrition education, and invited speakers such as farmers and promotoras (community-based nutrition educators). Handouts in English and Spanish are provided, as well as give-aways. Participating sites are also encouraged to arrange field trips to local farmers' markets with parents and children.

## **Demonstration Site Workshops**

In Spring of 2011, two participating preschools in Los Angeles and northern San Diego county will offer a one day workshop to interested preschools, daycare centers and family child care homes. These workshops will introduce the program and its components, as well as demonstrate its implementation and provide a best practice model through tours and mini interactive workshops. These workshops will be designed to effectively disseminate the program to child care providers.

## **National Website**

A website is in the process of being developed which will serve as a clearinghouse of preschool resources, materials and updates provided by farm to preschool-type programs around the country ([www.farmpreschool.org](http://www.farmpreschool.org)). This website will be modeled after the National Farm to School Network website ([www.farmentoschool.org](http://www.farmentoschool.org)) and is anticipated to be launched in early Spring 2011.

## **Evaluation**

As an integral component to the program, sites participate in an extensive evaluation process to document the success of the program, by measuring outcomes such as increased consumption, knowledge, and preference for fresh fruits and vegetables among preschoolers and their families. It is through evaluation measures that this program could potentially become a "best practices" model for others to utilize. Periodic evaluation is organized and administrated by UEPI, which include pre/post tests, observations, and one-time surveys. All forms are succinct and offered in Spanish for parents. UEPI provides copies of all surveys and questionnaires, assists with their implementation and analyzes results. UEPI also collaborates with sites to improve project components as they are being implemented, as part of process evaluation measures. Sites may also opt to adopt a wellness policy for their center, ensuring sustainability of improved nutrition and other healthy practices, and a template developed by UEPI and other collaborators will be provided.

For more information, please contact:

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